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AMERICAS

# Colombia Reaches New Peace Deal With Rebels

By NICHOLAS CASEY NOV. 12, 2016

The Colombian government and the nation's main rebel group said on Saturday that they had reached a "new final accord" to end their longstanding conflict, potentially reviving a deal that was rejected last month in a referendum.

The changes to the agreement with the rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or the FARC, were announced in Havana and addressed a range of topics — such as where rebels would be confined after disarming and how courts might address drug trafficking offenses — that negotiators said had troubled voters.

The agreement also appeared to withdraw a promise of guaranteed seats for rebels in Congress — one key demand of those who said the rebels would be unfairly rewarded with political positions.

In a televised address, President Juan Manuel Santos emphasized the need to ratify the agreement quickly, saying time was running out. "The cease-fire is fragile," he said. "The uncertainty generates fears and increases the risks to throw this immense effort overboard."

However, it was unclear whether the changes would placate voters who had sunk the deal by a thin margin, many on the grounds that it was too lenient on the rebels. After the vote, critics said they wanted rebel leaders to face prison sentences — a demand that seemed nearly impossible to meet after the first agreement had been signed.

Álvaro Uribe, a former Colombian president who led the campaign against the deal, issued a brief statement saying he wished to review the changes in coming days.

The fate of the 52-year war between Colombia and the FARC has been uncertain since the referendum nearly six weeks ago. Polls had indicated that the measure would be approved by a large margin, and the government had even held a signing ceremony with the rebels the week before.

But a vigorous campaign emerged against the deal, and it was rejected by 50.2 percent of voters.

The prospect of peace remained widely popular in Colombia, but for many, the terms of the deal did not offer justice after generations of conflict. Scenes of guerrilla fighters donning civilian clothes and preparing to enter politics touched a nerve for many voters who did not feel that the group had shown remorse for past crimes.

Catholic and evangelical Christian voters also joined the “No” campaign, hoping that it would be seen as a repudiation of the government’s socially liberal agenda, including the legalization of same-sex marriage. On Saturday, negotiators emphasized that both agreements’ references to gender and sexual orientation pertained only to the rebels.

Despite the setback of the referendum, Mr. Santos has received widespread international encouragement to complete the deal.

Days after the vote, he was named the winner of the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize, and the judges warned that it was up to him and the FARC to avoid a renewed war this year.

The United States, which played a role in both negotiations, backed the announcement on Saturday.

“President Santos and his negotiating team, those from the ‘No’ campaign, and other important sectors of Colombian society deserve credit for engaging in a far-reaching and respectful national dialogue following the plebiscite,” Secretary of State John Kerry said in a statement.

A version of this article appears in print on November 13, 2016, on page A10 of the New York edition with the headline: Colombia Has New Peace Deal With Rebels.

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